

Strategic planning

Mission Critical

Mission, vision, and value statements can help define small businesses, corporations, and movements – including FOSS. *By Jon “maddog” Hall*

I am writing this edition of my column from a small hotel in Nairobi, Kenya. On one of the inside walls of the hotel, close to the front desk, is a sign that has their mission, vision, core values, and motto. These are short and can probably be memorized easily:

Mission – We endeavor to exceed the expectations of our clients in our Services, Amenities and Lifestyle while protecting and conserving our natural environment.

Vision – To create an ideal environment with service and products that guarantees quality life beyond expectations.

Core Values – Service, Integrity, Trust, Mutual Respect, Team Work.

Motto – The future belongs to those who believe in the Power of their dreams.

Some of my readers might think these are a bit old-fashioned or quaint, but they go a long way toward creating a style, brand, and trademark, whether it be for a person, a company, or a country.

Mission

Linus Torvalds has stated his mission several times: to have “fun.” Of course “having fun” is a broad mission, and Linus has fun in many ways. Thankfully, he considers working on the kernel with his many friends fun. I also know he thinks being with his wife and daughters is fun. He has told me that traveling and giving talks is something he does not consider fun.

I have met many people who, like myself, think that writing code is fun. When you write a good program or do a good hack, you get that feeling of satisfaction that is “fun.”

Vision

Vision statements are useful in that they help you focus on the task at hand. When Digital Equipment Corporation first started out, their Vision was to move the mainframe computer out of the “glass

house” computer room and into the department. “Departmental computing” included affordable mini-computers, and through manufacturing and time-sharing, Digital reduced the cost of computing dramatically.

Later, Digital started to network the computers together, and their Vision statement was the “Network is the computer.” A lot of people remember that Sun Microsystems also used this as a marketing slogan, but Digital had it as its vision statement, and DECnet was born.

Your vision can change over time, but it should indicate to yourself and your employees what is important and what is not.

Core Values

If you read the headlines, core values may seem to be lacking or poorly set – for example, there are stories of corporate officers draining their companies of real value while earning extravagant salaries then laying off employees.

Here in Kenya, a government official wanted to know whether FOSS could break the cycle of people wanting to be a Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, or Mark Zuckerberg and instead simply let them strive to earn a good wage, have a comfortable living, and raise a good family while returning real value to society. FOSS cannot break that cycle, only society can. When we stop idolizing people for the money and things they have and start recognizing them for the life they lead, then we will have what the government official desired.

I often point out the lives of Dennis Ritchie [1], Maurice Wilkes, Grace Murray Hopper, Alan Turing [2], Hedy Lamarr [3], and others I consider to be true “heroes.” Did they have flaws? Of course, because they were human beings, but what they contributed to society cannot be overstated.

Motto

Just as a vision statement can help people focus on what is important, a good motto can help energize people. In one of my favorite movies, *Dead Poets Society*, an English teacher at a boys’ school tries to teach his students life lessons through his love of literature and poetry. His main lesson, repeated over and over again, was to be yourself and to act on it. “Seize the Day” was the motto that his students embraced.

That is why I end all of my blog posts with “Carpe Diem.” ■■■

INFO

- [1] RIP Dennis: [http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/Blogs/Paw-Prints-Writings-of-the-maddog/RIP-Dennis/\(kategorie\)/0](http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/Blogs/Paw-Prints-Writings-of-the-maddog/RIP-Dennis/(kategorie)/0)
- [2] In Honor of Alan Turing: [http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/Blogs/Paw-Prints-Writings-of-the-maddog/In-Honor-of-Alan-Turing-A-message-from-the-sponsor-UPDATED-for-Independence-Day/\(kategorie\)/0](http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/Blogs/Paw-Prints-Writings-of-the-maddog/In-Honor-of-Alan-Turing-A-message-from-the-sponsor-UPDATED-for-Independence-Day/(kategorie)/0)
- [3] Heroes: [http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/Blogs/Paw-Prints-Writings-of-the-maddog/Heros/\(kategorie\)/0](http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/Blogs/Paw-Prints-Writings-of-the-maddog/Heros/(kategorie)/0)

